

## Healthy Periods

Periods are a good thing! Having a period is part of the experience of a naturally cycling, healthy woman. In a natural cycle, our time of menstruation often comes with a decrease in energy and a need for extra sleep and nutritional support, but this time shouldn't be debilitating.

A woman can expect to bleed anywhere between 2 and 7 days of her cycle, with 3 to 6 days being ideal. In a healthy period, we expect 1-2 days of medium to heavy flow followed by several days of lighter flow. Over the course of her period, a woman can expect to release 10 to 35 ml of blood. A menstrual pad holds approximately 5 ml of blood when fully saturated.

## Period Problems

Fatigue and mild uterine cramping that does not interfere with daily activities is considered normal during menstruation. However, symptoms that are debilitating or interfere with daily activities are NOT normal. Let's break down some of the most common period problems:

- **Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS):** the cyclical emotional, behavioral, and physical symptoms that women may experience during the second half of their cycles
  - Symptoms include bloating, fatigue, acne, breast tenderness, sadness, anxiety, moodiness, and changes in appetite
  - If symptoms occur only one or two days before your period and are generally mild, they are not considered signs of PMS
- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD):** a more extreme version of PMS that is more severe because it is truly debilitating and impairs daily functioning. PMDD is a depressive disorder.
  - Symptoms include sadness, anxiety, variable moods, persistent irritability, decreased interest in usual activities, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, sleep issues, changes in appetite, breast tenderness, headaches, joint or muscle pain, and weight gain
- **Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS):** a metabolic disorder caused by irregularly high androgens
  - Outside of adolescents, PCOS is the most common cause of irregular periods
  - Symptoms include severe cramps, long or irregular cycles, heavy bleeding during menstruation, cystic acne, chronic fatigue and inflammation, cardiovascular issues, Type 2 Diabetes, poor body image, hair loss or growth, male-pattern hair growth (hirsutism), and thyroid disorders
- **Endometriosis:** a disorder where tissue similar to that which lines the uterus (called the endometrium) grows outside the uterus
  - Endometriosis is the most common cause of painful periods
  - Symptoms include cyclic pelvic pain, pain with your periods, pain with sex, and premenstrual spotting two or more days before your period

## Period Problems: Charting Your Path Forward

Many women who experience some type of period problem, no matter the root cause of the irregularity, are often offered hormonal contraception by their healthcare provider as a way of "regulating" the cycle or "treating" painful periods. However, hormonal contraception does nothing to treat a woman's underlying disease. Hormonal contraceptives work by suppressing the woman's natural cycle, and replacing it with a chemically-induced pattern. A woman's bleed while taking hormonal contraception is not a real period, it is by definition a "withdrawal bleed," a result of the sharp decrease in synthetic hormones.

Women do not have to choose between menstrual distress and artificially suppressing their cycles on the other. There is another way! There are root-cause treatment options available to women often called Restorative Reproductive Medicine. This approach works with a woman's anatomy and physiology to treat her underlying condition directly and restore her to a natural, healthy cycle. A woman's cycle chart can act as a powerful diagnostic tool, revealing patterns that can point a skilled healthcare professional toward the underlying cause of a woman's menstrual health problems. If you or someone you know is suffering from menstrual health distress, don't wait! Connect with a healthcare professional who can provide you with the help you need and deserve.

Period problems are real, and they can be healed.

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